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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-third session
Agenda item 10

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Letter dated 16 April 1997 from the Leader of the Delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Commission on Human Rights addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

On 9 April 1997, during the discussion of item 10 of the Commission's agenda, the delegation of China made a statement concerning the situation of human rights in Hong Kong and the policy of the United Kingdom Government in that respect. Shortly thereafter, that statement was issued to the press through, inter alia, the Xinhua news agency. Accordingly, the News Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom Government issued, on 11 April 1997, the response which is set out in the annex* to this letter.

I should be grateful if you would arrange for this letter, including its annex, to be circulated as a document of the Commission.

(Signed) Henry Steel
Leader of the United Kingdom Delegation
to the fifty-third session of the
United Nations Commission on Human Rights

* The annex is circulated as received, in the language of submission only.

ANNEX

NEWS DEPARTMENT RESPONSE TO XINHUA REPORT OF STATEMENT BY CHINESE REPRESENTATIVE AT THE UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN GENEVA OF 9 APRIL

In a statement on 9 April at the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR) 53 in Geneva, China made a number of assertions about the enjoyment of civil and political liberties by the people of Hong Kong. Two points merit a reply.

First, we flatly reject the allegation that the enactment of Hong Kong's Bill of Rights Ordinance and of legislation for an electoral system based on democratic principles - both of which were enacted by the legislature of Hong Kong and not (as implied) by the UK Government - are measures which in any way conflict with the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. They are consistent in every respect with those instruments.

In view of China's expressed desire to safeguard the human rights of the residents of HKSAR, we find it surprising that the Chinese Government should want to undermine existing human rights protections in Hong Kong. It is patently not the case that their proposed amendments to civil liberties legislation have the support of the Hong Kong community. On the contrary, they have caused widespread anxiety in Hong Kong.

Second, Hong Kong is a prosperous, peaceful and stable society. There can be no justification for reducing its civil liberties. Contrary to the suggestions made by China, the British Government will continue to administer Hong Kong up to 30 June 1997 with the express intention of maintaining that prosperous, peaceful and stable community.